



THE SAVVY CONSUMER COLUMN

The Savvy Consumer

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Consumer Affairs offers tips to avoid timeshare scams

NASHVILLE, TN – Have you received an offer in the mail promising a cheap travel package for a hotel stay or a short cruise? To get the discounted package, all you have to do is attend a timeshare presentation. Once you show up to the presentation, you may get more than you bargained for: high-pressure sales tactics and scammers that don't deliver what they promise.

Vacation timeshares give you the right to use a vacation home for a limited, planned period throughout the year. Consumers are usually contacted on the phone by a telemarketer or through the mail with a postcard asking them to call a toll-free number. Scams can occur at the front-end, when consumers are purchasing a timeshare. The salesperson might suggest that customers have to sign the papers that day or might claim to be overwhelmed with buyer requests for the same resort – all to pressure customers to make a hasty decision.

Scams can also beset a consumer trying to sell a timeshare. During a bad economy when many people can no longer afford a timeshare, owners can be more vulnerable to scammers. Telemarketers call people throughout the country offering to sell or rent the owners' timeshares in exchange for an advertising fee. Once the owner gives the telemarketer his or her credit card information, hundreds or thousands of dollars are then charged on that card. The timeshare goes unrented and its owner never again hears from the telemarketer.

Signs that a person might be dealing with a timeshare scammer:

- They initiate contact and solicit the consumer.
- They always ask for an upfront or advance fee.
- They come bearing a price that sounds too good to be true (*word of caution: it usually is*).
- They are not using a third-party closing or title company.
- They make "guarantees" that aren't in writing.

To avoid becoming a victim of a timeshare scam, customers should do research. Never pay any fee in advance of a sale and avoid giving in to any high-pressure sales tactics. Never wire money. Wiring money is like sending cash; the scammers get the money quickly and the sender

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never gets it back. There is usually no way to trace the money once it is wired. A seller who insists on wire transfers for payment is probably a scammer.

Consumer Affairs (www.tn.gov/consumer/) is a division of the Department of Commerce and Insurance (www.tn.gov/commerce/), which works to protect consumers while ensuring fair competition for industries and professionals who do business in Tennessee. www.tn.gov/commerce/, [@TNCommerceInsur](https://twitter.com/TNCommerceInsur) (Twitter), <http://on.fb.me/uFQwUZ> (Facebook), <http://bit.ly/ry1GyX> (YouTube)

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